GROSS MARGARET A
79 GEORGETOWN 3928

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ACTION ARA-15
INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSCT-00 SSO-00
INRE-00 PM-05 E-01 INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
SCS-06 CA-01 /260 W
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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO ICA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8197
DOD WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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PASS GUYANA WORKING GROUP
ICA FOR AR PGM/RC
E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS:
SUBJECT:MEDIA ACTIVITIES IN WAKE OF PORT-KAITUMA-JONESTOWN TRAGEDIES
1. SUMMARY: MORE THAN 100 REPRESENTATIVES FROM ALL MAJOR US AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ARE TREATING THE JONESTOWN TRAGEDY AS THE MAJOR NEWS STORY OF ITS KIND IN THE DECADE. THE RESULTING ONSLAUGHT OFMEDIA COVERAGE HAS TAXED USICA, EMBASSY AND GUYANESE RESOURCES SEVERELY, AND BASIC PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATION, TRANSPORTATION AND INFORMTION --COMPOUNDED BY WHAT HAD DEVELOPED INTO ONE OF THEGREAT RUMOR MILLS OF OUR TIME--HAVE STIRRED SHARP VERBAL CRITICISM OF THE US ROLE BY REPORTERS ON THE SCENE. WITH RECOVERY OFTHE BODIES NEARING COMPLETION. ATTENTION HAS SHIFTED TO THE MISSING SURVIVORS OF JONESTOWN, IF ANY, AND THE SEARCH EFFORTS FOR THEM. END SUMMARY.
2. NO ONE KNOWSHOW MANY PEOPLE WERE AT JONESTOWN ON
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NOVEMBER 18, WHEN THE CODEL RAY VISIT TRIGGERED THE LATENT VIOLENCE OF THE PEOPLES TEMPLE COMMUNE. BUT THE MEDIA ASSUMES AND INSISTS THAT, GIVEN SOME 800 PASSPORTS FOUND AT THE SITE, 600 BEDS IN THE CAMP, AND REPORTS OF THOSE WHO WERE THERE, A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER HAVE NOT TURNED UP. REPORTERS HAVE SCOURED GEORGETOWN IN AN EFFORT TO GAIN INTERVIEWS WITH THE SURVIVORS, WHO HAVE REPEATEDLY TOLD THE EMBASSY THEY DID NOT WANT TO BE INTERVIEWED. SOME, HOWEVER, APPARENTLY HAVE MET PRIVATELY WITH REPORTERS, CREATING FURTHER STRAINS IN A HIGHLY COMPETITIVE SITUATION. USICA HAS RECEIVED CONTINUOUS QUYRIES ABOUT REPORTS OF SURVIVORS RANGING IN NUMBER FROM TWO TO 200 WALKING TO GEORGETOWN THROUGH THE JUNGLE, TURNING UP ON A BOAT ON THE HIGH SEAS, APPEARING IN CARACAS, FOUND IN MASS GRAVES, ETC.
3. TWO BASIC PROBLEMS HAVE FURTHER COMPLICATED RELATIONS WITH THE MEDIA. USAF SPOKESMAN SAY ALL AIRCRAFT ARE BEING USED IN THE OPERATION AND THE MEDIA CANNOT
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BE FERRIED TO THE JONESTOWN SITE, INACCESSIBLE EXCEPT BY AIRCRAFT. HOWEVER, THE COG MINISTRY OF INFORMATION (MOI) ARRANGED SOME FLIGHTS IN GOG AIRCRAFT, STIRRING PROTESTS OF FAVORITISM FROM THOSE NOT INCLUDED. SOME REPORTERS ALSO OBTAINED PRIVATE AIRCRAFT TO TAKE THEM TO THE SCENE, WITHOUT NECESSARILY OBTAINING REQUIRED PRIOR APPROVAL FROM THE MOI. THE SECOND PROBLEM IS ONE OF COMMUNICATIONS, OR THE LACK OF IT. MILITARY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS DID NOT FUNCTION FOR THE FIRST 36 HOURS, AND EVEN NOW THERE ARE BOTH TECHNICAL AND FUNCTIONAL PROBLEMS IN GETTING FACTS TO THE MEDIA. LOCAL COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES ARE SORELY STRAINED; ONE REPORTER SAID HIS STORY WAS FILED ONLY PARTIALLY BECAUSE THE TELEX OPERATOR SAID IT WAS TOO LONG AND

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OTHERS WERE WAITING.

4. A PRESS BRIEFING SET UP BY USICA NOVEMBER 22 INCLUDED USAF PERSONNEL, A CONSULAR EXPERT FROM STATE, AND AN MOI REPRESENTATIVE WHO WAS OBVIOUSLY UNPREPARED. SOME 75 REPORTERS FUMED AND BLUSTERED ABOUT U.S. FAILURE TO INTENSIFY SEARCH EFFORTS, FAILURE TO FERRY THEM TO JONESTOWN (A COVER-UP SHOUTED ONE), FAILURE TO PREDICT THE DANGERS, FAILURE TO REACT QUICKLY ENOUGH. YET THE BRIEFING WAS VALUABLE IN GETTING SPECIFIC INFORMATION TO MOST OF THE MEDIA, AS WELL AS CLARIFYING THE MILITARY MISSION.

5. USICA SET UP PRESS CENTER AS FOCUAL POINT FOR MEDIA. WORKING WITH EMBASSY, USAF AND MOI TO COORDINATE INFORMATION. CARACAS ACAO PAT MOSER AND AR DEPUTY POLICY OFFICER FRED SHAVER WORKED WITH USICA STAFF IN HANDLING QUERIES, COORDINATING INFORMATION EFFORTS, AND PULLING TOGETHER AVAILABLE MATERIAL IN ONE LOCATION.

6. LOCAL MEDIA HAVE REACTED WITH SHOCK AT JONESTOWN INCIDENT. WITH MASSIVE COVERAGE IN GEORGETOWN BY NEWSPAPERS AND RADIO STATIONS (THERE IS NO TELEVISION). BUT THERE HAS BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT EDITORIAL CRITICISM OF THE U.S. OR ANY ASPECTOF BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS AS YET BEYOND DETAILS OF HANDLING OF CONSULR AND MEDIA AFFAIRS. AND POST HAS IMPRESSION BASED ON PERSONAL CONTACTS THAT DESPITE OPPOSITION PARTY'S EFFORTS TO MAKE POLITICAL CAPITAL OF IT, THERE IS NO TENDENCY TO MAKE OF THIS MORE THAN THE PERSONAL TRAGEDYOF MASSIVE PROPORTIONS IT ACTUALLY IS.

7. THERE MAY IN FACT BE SOME GAIN FROM ALL THIS. A REPORTER ASKING USAF ABOUT POLITICAL PROBLEMS INTERFERING

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WITH SEARCH AT PRESS BRIEFING WAS TOLD BY AN EXPERIENCED

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MILITARY OFFICER THAT US MILITARY HAS NEVER ENCOUNTERED BETTER COOPERATION, AND CITED GOG MILITARY AND POLICE FORCES FOR OUTSTANDING WORK. MOI REPRESENTATIVE WAS ON HAND WHEN STATEMENT WAS MADE, AND PRESUMABLY WILL REPORT THIS TO HIGHER AUTHORITIES WHO WERE SENSITIVE TO THE IMPLICATIONS OF A U.S. MILITARY FORCE OPERATING IN GUYANA.

3. IT IS LIKELY THAT UNLESS SOME INFORMATION GIVES CLUE TO WHEREABOUTS, OR EXISTENCE, OF SURVIVORS, MOST MEDIA WILL DEPART WITH COMPLETION OF REMOVAL OF BODIES FROM JONESTOWN AND RETURN OF SURVIVORS TO U.S., EXPECTED THIS WEEK-END. HOWEVER, IT WILL CONTINUE TO DRAW WRITERS AND ANALYSTS OF EVERY STRIPE FOR YEARS TO COME, AND USICA WILL BE REQUIRED TO DEAL WITH THEM. POST WOULD WELCOME AGENCY RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS ON CP CHANGES OR AMENDMENTS.

4. POST WILL REPORT BY FM WHEN FINAL WRAP-UP POSSIBLE.

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